



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.3543 | FAX (517) 373.0927

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/hammerstrom/

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Contact: Amy Zaagman
Toll Free: (888) 477-8238

Republicans Work to Protect the Environment from Aquatic Nuisance Species

Species cannot be Possessed or Imported into State

February 28, 2003- Senator Beverly S. Hammerstrom (R-Temperance), Majority Floor Leader, reintroduced a package of bills from last session aimed at protecting our Great Lakes, and other waterways in the state, from the invasion of nonnative aquatic nuisance species.

Hammerstrom, along with Senators Patricia Birkholz (R-Saugatuck Twp.) and Alan Sanborn (R-Richmond), introduced Senate Bills 226-229 to prohibit the importation of any genetically engineered organism (GEO) without the permission of the director of the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Natural Resources may also restrict or prohibit the importation of any GEO. A GEO is produced when an organism is modified with the genetic material of another organism. For example, fish farmers may genetically alter Salmon in order to get a faster growing, bigger fish. While this allows farmers to spend less on fish food and send the fish to the market sooner, the effects of these fish on the normal Salmon population are unknown at this time.

“Although I have always been an advocate of research and development, I have concerns with introducing these genetically altered fish into our waters to compete with the naturally existing populations,” said Hammerstrom.

“I am glad to once again be involved in this package of bills,” Sanborn said. “I feel that it is vital to the preservation of our delicate ecosystem to allow the directors of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources within this state to monitor the importation of genetically altered species.”

“As chair of the Natural Resources committee, I look forward to working with my colleagues on this issue,” said Birkholz. “The committee will work with the sponsors, as well as the directors of each department, in an effort to protect Michigan’s waters from the invasion of these aquatic nuisance species.”

In addition to regulating GEOs, Hammerstrom also reintroduced legislation to make it a crime to possess or release certain aquatic species. Species listed include the Chinese Snakehead, the Asian and Grass Carp, and the Rudd. An individual who violates this law will not only be fined or imprisoned, but will also be ordered to reimburse the state for damages to the natural resources as a result of introducing a nonnative species into our delicate environment. This legislation enhances recent action taken by K.L. Cool, director of the DNR, banning possession of live snakehead fish or species of Asian Carp. The bills are Senate Bills 214 and 215.

“People often times do not realize that species which are not indigenous to Michigan, and are introduced into our waters, can severely upset the stability of our ecosystem and even permanently change our natural landscapes,” Hammerstrom said. “State and local governments around the nation have paid millions of dollars to remedy the damaging effects these species have caused.”

All of the bills have been referred to the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee.